



Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sara Allender • Angela Estacion • Amanda Nabors

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned WestEd to develop a guide on using quality authorizing to promote high-quality charter schools. At the time, notions about how authorizers could contribute to the existence of such schools were in their infancy, and the publication, which profiles the oversight practices of eight selected authorizers,¹ was intended to advance the conversation. Although 10 years later the importance of quality authorizing practices is widely accepted, it's essential to continue the general conversation about charter school quality — especially as it relates to ensuring quality programming for the most disadvantaged and at-risk student populations. But it is also time to broaden that ongoing discussion to include the question of *equitable access*: What are some ways to better ensure that, when high-performing charter schools are present, all students have access to them? That is the topic of this policy brief.

This brief highlights the role that state- and district-level policymakers can play in supporting charter school access for all students. The brief is intended primarily for policymakers in the education agencies with which the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center (MACC@WestEd) partners to improve education for all students. Policymakers and practitioners elsewhere may also benefit from the brief's literature review and policy discussion.

For purposes of this brief, the concept of *equitable access* means that all students and families know what charter school options exist and that students have the ability to enroll and attend if they want to, regardless of where a student lives, the student's socioeconomic status, or the student's education status (e.g., whether a student needs special education). First, of course, state policy must allow school choice and charter schools specifically. But even in those states allowing charter schools, students' access can be limited by school location in relation to where students live, the school-related information available to students and families, and school enrollment practices.² Thus, equitable access means that charter schools must be an available option; that families must know about the schools, know how to apply, and then be able to successfully complete the enrollment process; and that, once enrolled, students must be able to get to the school (Schanzenbach, Mumford, & Bauer, 2016). The brief is premised on the understanding

1 <https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/choice/charter/authorizing/authorizing.pdf>

2 Other access limitations beyond the scope of this brief include the availability of new charter schools and/or the availability of seats within existing charter schools. These systemic limitations are the subject of ongoing exploration by the field.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

that equitable access to charter schools is a necessary but not sufficient condition for ensuring that a particular charter school environment will promote better outcomes for all of its students.

Rather than providing a comprehensive review of all policy strategies that might contribute to equitable charter school access, this brief focuses on three emerging strategies that, based on a review of charter school literature and on the experience of WestEd staff working on charter school issues, appear worthy of consideration by policymakers. The strategies are *unified enrollment systems*, *weighted lotteries*, and *comprehensive transportation access*.

The remainder of this brief consists of a short summary of charter school research; a more detailed explanation of the three strategies and the degree to which state law in each MACC state and the District of Columbia (D.C.) allows their use; a discussion of the district and charter school collaboration needed for successful adoption of the strategies; a brief consideration of resegregation as an unintended consequence of equitable charter school access; and suggestions for future research foci related to equitable access.

Charter School Definition

According to the National Charter School Resource Center (n.d.), “Charter schools are public schools operating under a ‘charter,’ essentially a contract entered into between the school and its authorizing agency. In addition to allowing the school to open, the charter provides the school with significant operational autonomy to pursue specific educational objectives. The autonomy granted under the charter agreement allows the school considerable decision-making authority over key matters of curriculum, personnel, and budget. Charter schools are often not a part of states’ current districts and, therefore, have few if any zoning limitations. Therefore, students attend charter schools by the choice of their parents or guardians rather than by assignment to a school district.” In practice, the definition of *charter school* is set in federal and state statute and can differ from state to state.

Literature Summary on Charter School Quality and Access Issues

QUALITY. The body of research on the quality and impact of charter schools is continually evolving. A recent meta-analysis (Betts & Tang, 2016) of 32 studies over the 2005–2013 period found that the positive impacts of charter schools varied by subject and school grade span. Specifically, study findings indicated that, compared to traditional public schools, charter schools produce significantly higher achievement gains in math for most grades but insignificant gains for reading achievement. Additional research (Angrist, Pathak, & Walters, 2013) found that the “No Excuses” and other high-expectations models of charter schooling tended to generate substantial and positive effects on achievement outcomes for urban students. And recent work from Berends (2015) found achievement gains for

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

students who attended charter schools in specific urban areas (i.e., New York City and Boston), which echoes findings from CREDO (2015) on the positive impacts of urban charter schools. Thus, while the research on charter schools as a whole has not identified consistent significant positive impacts on student achievement and other related outcomes, there are some indications that urban charter schools using a high-expectations model of instruction can yield positive effects.

PHYSICAL ACCESS. The physical location of charter schools is one factor in equitable access. Simply put, not all students have charter school options in their own neighborhood, in their broader school district, or, even, in a neighboring district. As it happens, charter schools are predominantly located in urban areas. Using 2013/14 data, Schanzenbach, Mumford, and Bauer (2016) found that the percentages of public school students attending charter schools varied widely by urbanicity. For example, in the District of Columbia, 42.4 percent of public school students attended charter schools compared to less than 1 percent in Iowa, Kansas, Maine, and Wyoming. (See exhibit 1 for charter school urbanicity in MACC region.)

Yet even in urban areas, where charter schools are more prevalent, location plays a role in a family's decisions about school. Research suggests that parents are more likely than not to choose schools within their immediate neighborhood. Additionally, low-income parents in urban settings are less likely than parents at higher income levels to have reliable transportation for reaching schools outside their immediate areas. Thus, even in more densely populated urban settings with more charter school options, proximity to home and ease of transportation still matter, especially for low-income families (Rhodes & DeLuca, 2014).

Exhibit 1. Percentage of Public School Students in MACC States Attending Charter Schools, by Urbanicity

MACC States	Urban	Suburban	Rural
DC	42.4%	0.0%	0.0%
DE	25.6%	6.8%	5.7%
MD	7.6%	1.1%	0.2%
NJ	16.1%	1.1%	0.5%
PA	20.2%	4.9%	0.8%

Source: Schanzenbach, Mumford, & Bauer, 2016. Available at http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/share_of_students_with_access_to_charter_schools_by_state

Dearth of Charter Schools in Rural Areas

Rural areas continue to struggle with how, if at all, to effectively implement charter school options. The availability of charter schools in rural areas is limited and among those charter schools that do exist, 85 percent are located in rural fringe areas — in other words, just outside more-populated areas (Stuit & Doan, 2012). With a low supply of charter schools and significant distances between home and school, rural communities face additional challenges in ensuring equitable access.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

PARENT INFORMATION AND DECISION-MAKING. The existence of charter schools in any given geographic area does not itself guarantee these options will be accessible to all families. Whitehurst, Reeves, and Rodrigue (2016) note that considerable attention has to be paid to how parents choose schools. Though parents may claim to make decisions based on the perceived quality of the school options, there is a substantial research base, dating back more than 15 years, indicating that individual parent choice is often driven by an implicit bias toward common characteristics, which is to say that, given the chance, families tend to self-select into schools with demographics similar to their own (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Holme & Richards, 2009; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2002; Weiher & Tedin, 2002).

To Whitehurst et al.'s point, Russell (2013) notes that not all parents necessarily know all of their child's available charter school options. Compared to minority and less affluent parents, Russell says, non-minority and more affluent parents tend to cast a wider net when considering choice options, perhaps due in part to having more social capital (i.e., access to information and/or larger social networks).

SPECIAL POPULATIONS. Students with disabilities face *additional* access challenges based on their distinct education needs. A 2012 Government Accountability Office report (Scott, 2012) found that, compared to traditional public schools, charter schools regularly enrolled fewer students with disabilities. Report authors speculate on several factors that might contribute to this disparity: some parents of students with disabilities choosing not to exercise their choice options; some charter schools explicitly or implicitly discouraging enrollment of this student population; some traditional public school districts placing students with disabilities in schools (rather than parents exercising direct choice); and some charter schools having limited resources (including physical space) that may make it difficult to meet the needs of students with severe disabilities.

Policy Strategies for Supporting Equitable Access to Charter Schools

Given variability in local context, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenge of ensuring equitable access. However, drawing both on the research literature about access and on WestEd's own experience working with policymakers in the charter school arena, this brief identifies three policy strategies that may be helpful in moving the needle toward greater access.

Unified Enrollment Systems

A unified enrollment system supports equitable access to charter schools by coordinating key elements of the information, application, and enrollment process across schools within a district. A unified system could include a comprehensive information structure for parents that explains school options,

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

enrollment processes, and other relevant issues; a centralized process (i.e., lottery) for assigning students to schools; common application forms; and common timelines for applications, acceptances, and registration (Gross & Campbell, 2017). This kind of system streamlines the application and enrollment process, making it easier for students and their families to know about charter schools in their area and, if they are interested, to understand how and when to apply. Development and implementation of a fully unified system requires considerable coordination across multiple stakeholder groups, but the effort can yield benefits not just to students and families, but to both schools and districts. For example, by working within a unified system, charter schools no longer need to organize and implement their own lottery systems. For districts, using a unified system may provide a better understanding of the overall demand for schools (Gross & Campbell, 2017).

A unified enrollment system is typically coordinated by a city or local district and applies to the schools within the geographic boundaries of that city or district. In some instances, like in the District of Columbia, individual charter schools may choose to run their own lottery and opt out of the unified enrollment system.

With flexible state policies around unified enrollment (for examples, see exhibit 2), local context is key to informing decisions about which components to initially include in the system. Further, the components of a system may evolve along with the context of the environment in which it operates (e.g., over time a district may choose to provide new or different information to help parents select schools). Common components of unified enrollment systems include a one-stop website to meet parent information needs, common application content and deadlines, a systemwide lottery, and common notification and acceptance procedures. Most unified enrollment systems also allow for individual school preferences (e.g., siblings, children of school staff) to be considered in the lottery process.

Denver and New Orleans were among the first cities to develop universal enrollment systems (circa 2012), and their experiences show some promising results — as well as some remaining challenges related to those results (Gross, Dearmond, & Denice, 2015). Leaders and school administrators in both districts have reported improved predictability of school demand and transparency in the applications and enrollment process. However, while parent information policies standardized information and allowed parents to more easily learn about their children's schooling options, the researchers found in Denver that minority and low-income families participated in the unified enrollment system at lower rates than their white and more affluent counterparts. In New Orleans, parent survey results suggested that parents experienced challenges with the new process as it formalized and centralized what had otherwise been a more informal and local school enrollment process.

In the MACC region, three metropolitan areas currently use a unified enrollment system: The District of Columbia, Camden, New Jersey, and Newark, New Jersey. The District of Columbia began with coordinated timelines and application materials across its traditional public schools and charter schools before implementing My School DC. My School DC is a partnership between the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the majority of the city's charter schools (each of which is its own Local Education Agency in the city). My School DC uses a single application and lottery to determine enrollment at all

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

participating charter schools, pre-school options, out-of-boundary public schools, and selective high schools. (Students can automatically enroll at their assigned in-boundary school without participating in the lottery.) My School DC includes school profiles for each participating school, ensuring that all parents have access to the same school-related information. (My School DC also includes a list of charter schools that do not participate in the system in case parents are interested in directly applying to those programs.)

The seeds of Camden's fairly new unified system, called Camden Enrollment, were planted following a district leadership change in 2013. The new district leaders sought community feedback about the public schools and heard the need to simplify the enrollment process to provide better services to families and more equitable access across school types (Campbell et al., 2016). Camden Enrollment includes mapping software that allows parents to find schools near them. Each school has a basic profile that includes contact information, hours of operation, information about before- and after-care opportunities, and information about enrollment. (At the time of this writing, the application window for Camden Enrollment was not open and the full website was not viewable.) Early evaluation results for the Camden system (Campbell et al., 2016) showed that, with some caveats (e.g., technology issues or concerns about the quality of available schools), parents found the new enrollment system to be efficient and fair, though there were some concerns that the additional requirements for selective schools were redundant.

Exhibit 2. Unified Enrollment Practices in MACC States

MACC States	Unified Enrollment Practices
DC	D.C. uses My School DC, a common enrollment application and lottery system for participating public charter schools and traditional public schools and students can apply to most charter schools, all preschool programs, out-of-boundary schools, and selective citywide high schools through the system. The website includes profiles of each participating school, as well as a calendar with all relevant dates and deadlines.
DE	State law does not specifically provide for a unified enrollment system. There is no current practice of using a unified enrollment system in any district.
MD	State law does not specifically provide for a unified enrollment system. There is no current practice of using a unified enrollment system in any district.
NJ	State law does not specifically provide for a unified enrollment system; however, Newark and Camden have each undertaken efforts to offer a unified enrollment system within their boundaries.
PA	State law does not specifically provide for a unified enrollment system. A unified system has been previously proposed in Philadelphia but has not been implemented.

Source: <http://www.myschooldc.org/>; <http://newarkenrolls.org/>; Results compiled by authors' review of state statutes and charter program websites.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd®

Weighted Lotteries

Weighted lotteries differ from the standard enrollment lottery used in charter school admissions by allowing schools to give additional weight to students from particular populations, such as those with low socioeconomic status or special needs. Emerging thinking on the use of weighted lotteries is that they have the potential to greatly influence the makeup of individual charter schools by allowing schools to more intentionally enroll targeted populations, such as traditionally underserved students (Quick, 2016; National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools, April 2017).

State-by-state policies on the use of weighted lotteries vary greatly. An analysis conducted on behalf of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (Baum, 2015) found that no states expressly prohibited the use of weighted lotteries, and seven states were silent on the matter. Statutes in another 16 states could be interpreted as prohibiting their use in one of two ways: Either state law required equal weights in enrollment lotteries or it did not permit additional preferences beyond those allowed in existing law (e.g., sibling preference, returning students). Conversely, 4 states expressly permitted the use of weighted lotteries and 19 had statutes that could be interpreted as allowing their use. Policies in the states served by MACC exemplify this range (see exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Weighted Lottery Policies of MACC States

MACC States	Weighted Lottery Policies
DC	State law explicitly prohibits admissions decisions based on certain characteristics, including any that would give preference to educationally disadvantaged students. State law allows preferences for reasons other than educational disadvantage (e.g., siblings).
DE	State law permits preferences for admissions for various groups of educationally disadvantaged students, but does not define preference. State law allows preferences for reasons other than educational disadvantage.
MD	State law does not explicitly state whether preferences are permitted in admissions.
NJ	State law allows charters to limit admissions to various subsets of educationally disadvantaged students without defining what limiting admissions means. Other aspects of state charter law suggest that the state intends to prioritize access and opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students. State law allows preferences for reasons other than educational disadvantage.
PA	State law allows charters to limit admissions to various subsets of educationally disadvantaged students without defining what limiting admissions means. State law allows preferences for reasons other than educational disadvantage.

Source: Baum, 2015

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd®

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education released new nonregulatory guidance for its Charter Schools Program (CSP) grants that allowed grant-funded schools to use weighted lotteries if specifically allowed by state law (Elementary and Secondary Education Act: Nonregulatory Guidance Charter Schools Program, 2014). Then, with the 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the CSP program statute began allowing the use of weighted lotteries so long as their use was not prohibited in state law. Even so, weighted lotteries have been slow to emerge as a common strategy, and there is little research on the degree to which, if any, they ensure more equitable access.

Comprehensive Transportation Access

Because students must be able to physically travel to their charter school of choice, equitable access may require that students also have access to appropriate transportation. The concept of appropriateness is important: Providing public transit passes may be fine as a transportation strategy for middle and high school students, but is not suitable for kindergarteners and other younger children. While the majority of states do not have laws assigning specific responsibility for providing charter school transportation, some do (Thomsen, 2014). In the MACC region, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware have laws making districts responsible for providing free transportation to charter school students under specific circumstances (exhibit 4). And, although District of Columbia charter law does not provide transportation guidance, the school district's school transit subsidy program, "Kids Ride Free," offers free or reduced transit fares to all DC public, charter, and private school students ages 5-21 (District Department of Transportation, 2017).

Exhibit 4. School Choice Transportation Policies in MACC States

MACC States	Transportation Policies
DC	For students enrolled in an elementary or secondary public school in DCPS, whether traditional or charter, D.C.'s Kids Ride Free program provides free rides on Metrobus, Metrorail, and the D.C. Circulator to get them to and from school and school-related activities. Traditional public schools and most charter schools in D.C. provide their own bus service only for special education students.
DE	Under Delaware Code Title 14, Chapter 5. Charter Schools, a charter school can request that the district in which it is located provide transportation for charter school students who live in that district on the same basis that the district provides transportation for students who attend a traditional district school. In the alternative, a charter school may request a payment from the state equal to 70 percent of the average per-student transportation cost within the district, after which the charter school becomes responsible for providing transportation for its students. If charter school students live outside the district, students' parents are responsible for transporting them to an existing charter school bus route.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd®

MACC States	Transportation Policies
MD	Maryland's code makes no specific provision for transportation to choice schools. Transportation is not provided to students enrolled in charter schools unless individual schools provide it.
NJ	According to New Jersey Statutes Annotated (NJS) 18A:36A-13 and New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC) 6A:27-3.1, district boards of education are required to provide transportation or "aid in lieu" of transportation to K-12 students who attend a charter school. Some districts adhere to this by providing bus service to students living beyond a certain radius from the school or by providing bus passes to older students living beyond a particular radius.
PA	Section 1726-A of Article XVII-A: Charter Schools of Pennsylvania State Statutes states, "Students who attend a charter school located in their school district of residence, a regional charter school of which the school district is a part, or a charter school located outside district boundaries at a distance not exceeding ten (10) miles by the nearest public highway shall be provided free transportation to the charter school." Transportation is not required for K-5 students who live within 1.5 miles or for students in grades 6-8 living within 2 miles of the nearest public highway from the charter school they attend, except if there are hazardous walking conditions or if the local district provides transportation for children in the same grades who attend a traditional public school.

Source: Results compiled by authors' review of state statutes and charter program websites.

Key Considerations When Planning for Equitable Charter School Access

In thinking about how to ensure equitable access to charter schools, policymakers will want to pay attention to two issues: the first, an implementation consideration, is the need for district and charter school collaboration; the second, an outcome consideration, is a trend in the school choice context toward student resegregation.

District and Charter School Collaborations

The responsibility for promoting equitable access to charter schools does not rest solely with either school districts or with charter schools. Equitable access can only be attained when districts and charter schools see this as a shared goal and work together to reach it. Thus, district and charter school collaboration is of growing interest as districts and states struggle with how to adapt to the changing education ecosystems within which they exist. Collaboration between districts and charter schools offers both an opportunity

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

to benefit by leveraging their respective resources to provide more opportunities to more children. For example, in one arrangement a district may assist a charter operator in providing special education services to charter students while the charter operator reciprocates by offering art and music electives to students attending traditional public schools in the district (Whitmire, 2014). This kind of arrangement can give students a wider range of services or opportunities than might otherwise be available.

Collaboration between traditional public school districts and charter schools can take a variety of legal or contractual forms, one of the more common being a compact. A compact is a document formalizing a relationship between a traditional public school district and a charter school or charter management organization in which both parties agree to collaborate around a specific set of terms. That collaboration can include sharing a variety of physical, curricular, and data-based resources. In Denver Public Schools, for example, a compact between district and charter leaders led to the launch of a unified enrollment system, an increase in the number of students with special needs enrolled in charter schools, and the sharing of instructional practices across schools.

Collaboration between a district and charter schools is especially critical when it comes to supporting students with disabilities. As Rhim, Sutter, and Campbell (2016) note, providing effective special education services presents challenges under any circumstances. Collaboration between districts and charters around this particular issue could allow educators in both sectors to share their expertise and skills in order to generate stronger practice. Ideally, such collaboration would expand access to high-quality programming for this student population.

Understanding the particular context in communities that seek to facilitate collaboration between districts and charter schools is crucial to the success of that collaboration. District and charter leaders should identify mutual interests and focus on issues that will lead to focused partnerships and result in clear accomplishments for both parties (Lake, Yatsko, Gill, & Opalka, 2017). States can use funding to incentivize cooperation, promote strong charter authorization practices, and help facilitate family-friendly solutions that can promote the use of systems (e.g., unified enrollment systems, transportation systems) that move beyond the district-charter division (Lake, Yatsko, Gill, & Opalka, 2017). Making use of individuals who have experience in both district and charter sectors can be a great resource when developing collaborations, particularly in contexts where there is significant distrust or combativeness. These “boundary spanners” can more easily identify mutual goals and resources that may be available to share, and, if given the sufficient authority, access, and support, they ease tensions (Yatsko & Bruns, 2015).

Resegregation and School Choice

A recent Brookings report (Whitehurst, 2017) found a positive correlation between how “choice-friendly” a district is and how racially imbalanced its individual schools are; that is, where policies exist to support parental choice, parents routinely choose schools in a manner that results in increased segregation. Another piece of research, an analysis of student transfers between charter schools and traditional public

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd

schools in Michigan, found social and economic implications as students moved from one school sector to another. In particular, the analysis found that the redistribution of nonminority and more affluent students from traditional public schools to charter schools tended to “intensify the isolation of disadvantaged students [who remained in the] less effective urban schools serving a high concentration of similarly disadvantaged students” (Ni, 2012).

At least two factors contribute to this trend toward greater segregation within the school choice context. One is that, as noted in the literature summary above, given the opportunity, families tend to choose schools for their children based on how similar a school’s demographics are to their own (Fiske & Ladd, 2000). Another factor is that a lot of charter schools are expressly designed to prioritize the needs of traditionally disadvantaged student populations, which tend to be largely minority and low-income students. As they consider equitable access and other important charter school issues, policymakers should be aware of the implications, including potential trade-offs, of this trend.

Areas for Additional Policy Research

Ongoing conversation and action focused on equitable access would profit from additional research-based information, especially in the following areas:

ENTRY POINTS AND BACK-FILLING SEATS. Charter schools are required to run lotteries when they receive more applications than they have seats available. This differs from the traditional public school system in which a district must accept all students who are eligible to attend, regardless of their grade level, the time of year, student ability, or other factors. In practice, students’ access to charter schools is usually limited to traditional transition points (e.g., kindergarten, grade 6, grade 9). Also, in some instances, charter schools may choose not to fill seats that are vacated midyear. As a result, access to charter schools may be greatly limited for students who want to enroll at some time other than a traditional transition point. This issue has become especially critical given ESSA’s recent revisions to accepted lottery policies; under ESSA, charter school students can move from one school in a charter school network to another in the network (e.g., from a middle school to a high school) without needing to participate in the lottery. This, in essence, creates feeder patterns within charter school networks that may limit access points for students not already in the network of affiliated schools. More research is needed to determine the impact of these types of enrollment policies that potentially reduce access points down to a select number of grades or openings in charter schools.

STUDENT ATTRITION, RETENTION, AND MOBILITY. Access to a charter school does not ensure retention, and access alone yields no benefits if a student does not remain in that program. There is some research on whether achievement results are linked to retention patterns in specific models (Nichols-Barrer, Gill, Gleason, & Tuttle, 2014), but broader research is needed to determine if there is a difference in student attrition, retention, and mobility trends within charter schools compared to traditional public schools and, if so, what the implications might be.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd®

MARKET SHARE. The concentration of charter schools in a given area has implications for equitable access efforts. A recent report from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and Public Impact (Doyle, Kim, & Rausch, 2017) recognizes that as charters serve more students, there must be a concerted effort among local stakeholders to ensure that there are sufficient information systems to inform parents, equitable enrollment practices, and the necessary infrastructure to support students to attend their school of choice. Still, more research is needed to understand the systemic impacts of fluctuations in the market share of charter schools and their implications for equitable access or the lack thereof.

Conclusion

It is incumbent on states and districts to continue to consider and explore the portfolio of existing school opportunities for their students, to have systems in place to support high-quality charter schools, and to ensure equitable student access to those schools. More must be done to provide families and their students with clear information about charter schools in their area and to provide all students who are interested with meaningful opportunities to enroll in and attend those schools. Because access for the sake of access serves no one, more must also be done to ensure that students thrive in their school of choice.

References

- Angrist, J. D., Pathak, P. A., & Walters, C. R. (2013). Explaining charter school effectiveness. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 2013, 5(4): 1-27. Cambridge, MA.
- Baum, L. E. (2015). *State laws on weighted lotteries and enrollment practices*. Washington, DC: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
- Berends, M. (2015). Sociology and school choice: What we know after two decades of charter schools. *Annual Review of Sociology* 41(1):159-80. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112340.
- Betts, J. R., & Tang, E. Y. (2016, March). *A meta-analysis of the literature on the effect of charter schools on student achievement*. Paper presented at the spring conference of SREE, Washington, DC.
- Campbell, C., Gross, B., Hernandez, J., Mccann, C., & Yatsko, S. (2016). *Unifying enrollment in Camden: How families experienced the new enrollment system*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.
- CREDO/Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (2015). *Urban charter school study report on 41 regions*. Stanford, CA: Author. Available at <https://urbancharters.stanford.edu/download/Urban%20Charter%20School%20Study%20Report%20on%2041%20Regions.pdf>.
- District Department of Transportation. (2017). *School transit subsidy program*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at <https://ddot.dc.gov/page/school-transit-subsidy-program>.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Doyle, D., Kim, J., & Rausch, M. K. (2017). *Beyond the fringe: Charter authorizing as enrollment grows*. Chicago, IL: National Association of Charter School Authorizers; Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Available at <http://www.qualitycharter.org/policyresearch/archive/beyond-the-fringe>.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act:
Nonregulatory Guidance Charter Schools Program,
Title V, Part B (2014).

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015–2016).

Fiske, E. B., & Ladd, J. F. (2000). *When schools compete: A cautionary tale*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Gross, B., & Campbell, C. (2017). *A guide to unifying enrollment: The what, why, and how for those considering it*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

Gross, B., Dearmond, M., & Denice, P. (2015). *Common enrollment, parents, and school choice. Early evidence from Denver and New Orleans*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

Holme, J., & Richards, M. (2009). School choice and stratification in regional context: Examining the role of inter-district choice. *Peabody Journal of Education* 84 (2): 150–71.

Kleitz, B., Weiher, G. R., Tedin, K., & Matland, R. (2000). Choice, charter schools, and household preferences. *Social Science Quarterly* 81(3): 846–54.

Lake, R., Yatsko, S., Gill, S., & Opalka, A. (2017). *Bridging the district-charter divide to help more students succeed*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

National Charter School Resource Center. (n.d.) *What is a charter school?* Available at <https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/what-is-a-charter-school>.

Ni, Y. (2012). The sorting effect of charter schools on student composition in traditional public schools. *Educational Policy* 26(2): 215–42. doi:10.1177/0895904810386598.

Nichols-Barrer, I., Gill, B. P., Gleason, P., & Tuttle, C. C. (2014). Does student attrition explain KIPP's success?: Evidence on which students leave KIPP middle schools and who replaces them. *Education Next*, 14(4): 62–70. Available at <http://educationnext.org/student-attrition-explain-kipps-success/>.

Quick, K. (2016). *How to achieve socioeconomic integration in schools*. New York, NY: The Century Foundation.

Rhim, L. M., Sutter, J., & Campbell, N. (2016). *Improving outcomes for students with disabilities: Negotiating common ground for district and charter school collaboration*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/01/31/297746/improving-outcomes-for-students-with-disabilities/>.

Rhodes, A., & DeLuca, S. (2014). Residential mobility and school choice among poor families. In A. Lareau & K. Goyette (Eds.), *Choosing homes, choosing schools* (pp.137–66). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Russell, J. (2013). 'It's our best choice right now': Exploring how charter school parents choose. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 21: 1–25. doi:10.14507/epaa.v22n55.2014.

Schanzenbach, D. W., Mumford, M., & Bauer, L. (2016). *Who has access to charter schools?* Washington, DC: The Hamilton Project.

Schneider, M., Teske, P., & Marschall, M. (2002). *Choosing schools: Consumer choice and the quality of American schools*. NJ: Princeton University Press.

Scott, G. A. (2012). *Charter schools: Additional federal attention needed to help protect access for students with disabilities*. Report to Congressional Requesters. GAO-12-543.

Working Together to Support Equitable Access to Charter Schools

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MID-ATLANTIC
COMPREHENSIVE
CENTER

WestEd®

Stuit, D. A., & Doan, S. (2012). *Beyond city limits: Expanding public charter schools in rural America*. [Issue Brief]. Washington, DC: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Available at https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NAPCS_Beyond-City-Limits_Issue-Brief_2_27_20120223T101259.pdf.

Thomsen, J. (2014). *Fifty state analysis of charter school transportation provisions*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Weiher, G. R., & Tedin, K. L. (2002). Does choice lead to racially distinctive schools? Charter schools and household preferences. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 21(1): 79–92.

Whitehurst, G. J., Reeves, R. V., & Rodriguez, E. (2016). *Segregation, race, and charter schools: What do we*

know? Washington, DC: Center on Children and Families at Brookings. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/segregation-race-and-charter-schools-what-do-we-know/>.

Whitehurst, G. J. (2017). New evidence on school choice and racially segregated schools. *Evidence Speaks Reports*, Vol. 2, 33. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/whitehurst-report.pdf>.

Whitmire, R. (2014). Inside successful district-charter compacts. *Education Next*, vol. 14, no. 4. Available at <http://educationnext.org/inside-successful-district-charter-compacts/>.

Yatsko, S., & Bruns, A. (2015). *The best of both worlds: School district-charter sector boundary spanners*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.



The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center (MACC@WestEd) is part of a federal technical assistance network of 15 Regional Comprehensive Centers and seven supporting Content Centers. This network of centers works closely with the Regional Educational Laboratories and other technical assistance providers to ensure effective coordination of services to SEAs and their constituents. The U.S. Department of Education selected WestEd to operate the MACC in October 2012 to provide direct assistance to the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. MACC@WestEd works in partnership with states in building their capacity to implement state-level initiatives and support district- and school-level efforts intended to improve education outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, and raise the quality of instruction.



WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency that partners with education and other communities throughout the United States and abroad to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has more than a dozen offices nationwide, from Massachusetts, Vermont, Georgia, and Washington, DC, to Arizona and California, with headquarters in San Francisco. For more information, visit WestEd.org or call 415.565.3000.

The contents of this brief were developed under a cooperative agreement, #S283B120026, from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.